



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 105th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 144

WASHINGTON, WEDNESDAY, APRIL 29, 1998

No. 50

Senate

S3798

THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOUNDING OF ISRAEL

Mr. BIDEN. Mr. President, I would like to recount a little history--a history I'm sure many are familiar with. One hundred years ago last August, the first World Zionist Congress convened in the Swiss city of Basel. Although the gathering attracted little attention at the time, what transpired then would forever change the course of Jewish history, and indeed world history.

What later came to be known as the Basel Program stated quite simply that the aim of Zionism was 'To create for the Jewish people a home in Palestine secured by public law.'

With that simple proposition, the delegates at the first Congress formally set into motion the Jewish national liberation movement. It would mean the fulfillment of a spiritual yearning that had remained unrealized for over two millennia.

At the conclusion of the conference, Theodor Herzl recorded a prescient entry in his diary:

In Basel, I founded the Jewish state. If I were to say this aloud I would meet with laughter; but in another five years, and certainly in another fifty years, everyone will be convinced of this.

From the distance of a hundred years, I can say we are convinced.

Of course, it took fifty years of sacrifice--and a world shamed by the Holocaust--before Herzl's dream of a Jewish homeland became a reality. But it happened,

and tomorrow we celebrate fifty years of Israeli independence. In that short span of time, Israel has become the beacon of hope for Jews the world over. It has successfully absorbed wave after wave of immigrants from every corner of the globe. It has built a thriving economy larger than the economies of all its immediate neighbors combined. It is the sole democracy in a region where dictatorships and monarchies are the norm. It excels in science, technology, and culture far out of proportion to its small population.

In short, the Jewish people have, after long tribulation, taken their rightful place among nations. And Israel has become a symbol to all of us.

The very fact that Israel exists means that Jews will never again be at someone else's mercy. They are masters of their destiny. Israel is the tangible expression of the solemn vow we made after the Holocaust--'Never Again.'

Never again will Jews be powerless. Never again will they have to rely upon the mercy and goodwill of an overlord. Never again will they have to watch helplessly as nearly half of their people is exterminated. Put simply, Israel symbolizes the restoration of Jewish independence and dignity.

Nearly a quarter century ago as a junior Senator on the Foreign Relations Committee, in my first official trip overseas, I made a formative journey to Israel. It was just after the Yom Kippur war--a war that vividly

brought home Israel's vulnerability as well as the absolute necessity of an intimate U.S.-Israel relationship.

The lessons I learned on that journey have remained with me ever since. In the past twenty-five years, I have worked with six different Israeli Prime Ministers and six different American Presidents. I have been twice in the majority party in the Senate and I am now in the minority for the second time.

But through it all, the United States relationship with Israel has remained a constant feature. It transcends individual leaders and political parties. It is not subject to the vagaries of international events. The bond between Israel and the United States is unbreakable.

This strategic and moral partnership between Israel and the United States has made possible the peace agreements between Israel and three former adversaries.

As Israel's enemies have seen that they cannot drive a wedge between our two countries, so they have come to recognize slowly but surely that Israel is here to stay.

I know that I speak for many of my colleagues when I say that the American commitment to Israel over the next 50 years will be just as reliable as it has been in Israel's first 50 years.

I urge my colleagues to support this joint resolution and I yield the floor.